

Testimony for SB 894 Selling Chocolate products in CT Liquor Stores

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 984 today. My name is Carmen Romeo and I represent Fascia's Chocolates, founded by my mother and father-in-laws in Waterbury in 1964. Our 3rd generation is now handcrafting wonderful confections in our 57th year in business.

I'd like to discuss why current CT statute does not allow the sales of chocolate in a liquor store. Most people, including many liquor store owners and state legislators, do not know this and wonder why, since it seems so compatible. Most have simply attributed the current language to oversight in this regard when the current law was written.

We continually get contacted by liquor store owners who want to purchase our products as a wholesale customer whom I have had to inform that they cannot resell it. With Valentine's Day coming up, I have had another round of requests which I have, again turned down.

Pairing chocolate with Wine, Beer or other Spirits is a fun activity which I been doing with many venues who hold permits to do so. During 2020, I have been able to make pairings a virtual experience and have used them as a fundraising event. One of the logistical issues of doing such an event is having a single point of sale for both the alcohol and chocolate for the participants, especially if the organization has supporters in a wide geographic area. We can increase the number of fundraisers we do for nonprofits if selling chocolate under a Package Store Permit was possible.

I recognize that there are very strong opinions and serious differences between Grocers and Liquor Store owners regarding this statute. I would like to acknowledge that we currently sell our products through independent grocers and several of our Retail Partners have testified here today. We would not advocate for anything that they are against. I haven't spoken to anyone that has a problem with the ability to sell chocolate in a liquor store. The wording controlling this is very key to making it palatable to all.

As was mentioned earlier today, Section 30.20 covering Package store permits cites, quote, No store operating under a package store permit shall sell any commodity other than alcoholic liquor except that, notwithstanding any other provision of law, such store may sell, unquote and then the statute goes on to list 15 separate items including things

like (6) cheese or crackers and (7) olives. My written testimony includes the entire applicable section of the current statute.

While it would be very simple to add the word "Chocolate" into one of the subdivisions or add its own subdivision. While I would not oppose this addition, I would suggest that more specific language such as 'Boxed Chocolates or confections packaged specifically to pair with liquor' be used so that your general snack product like a Snickers bar or Reeses Peanut Butter cup are not allowed.

While my intent in testifying today is specific to this section of the law, I am aware that numerous requests have been made to the Department of Consumer Protection to allow inclusion of Liquor in the manufacturing of chocolate confections. I can attest that I get requests I get all the time from consumers about this and I must simply decline citing Connecticut law.

There are many wonderful confections that we can make including Bourbon Cherry cordials and caramels, beer and wine infused truffles and more. I can tell you that one substantially sized chocolatier, Hauser Chocolates, left Bethel, CT a number of years ago to relocate to Rhode Island just to be able to pursue this business.

I am not familiar enough with the Liquor Control Laws to suggest specific changes to sections of the statute or know what licenses might be needed to pursue such business but I would like to offer any help necessary in making the infusion of chocolate with liquor possible in Connecticut.

In closing, I hope 2021 can be the year we make a very common sense change to our law. What can be more bi-partisan than chocolate?

Thank You.